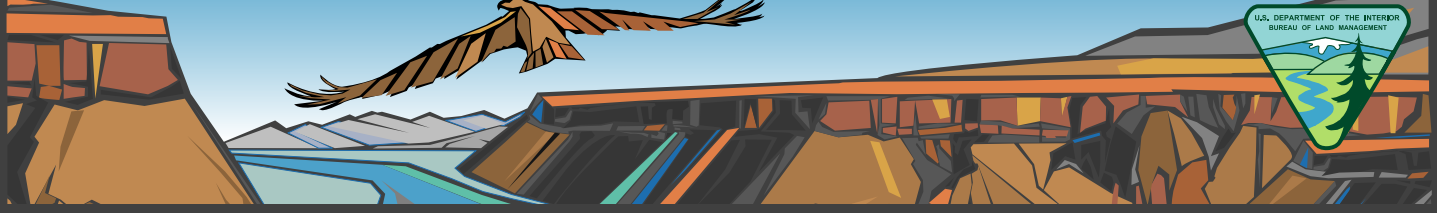


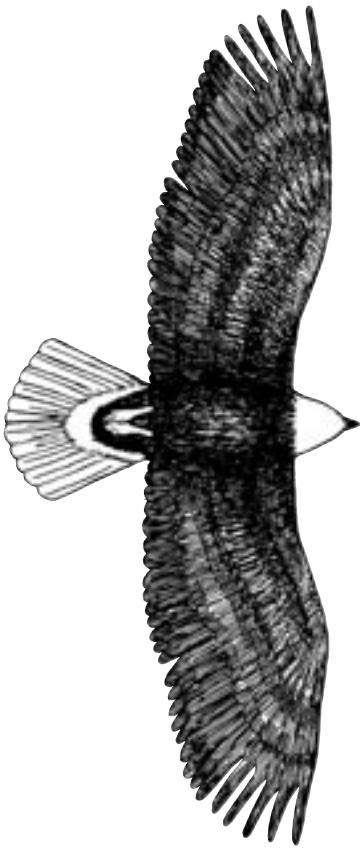
# Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area



## Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*)

### Description/size

Wing span: 72 to 96 inches  
Length: 28 to 38 inches  
Weight: 7 to 14 pounds



Dark brown raptor with a white head and tail. The large beak, eyes, and feet are yellow. This adult plumage is attained when the bird is about 4-5 years old. Up until that time, the plumage varies from an all brown juvenile stage through a series of brown bodied plumages that show varying degrees of white on the belly, under the wings and on the back, with dark or mottled heads and tails. The beak and eyes of juveniles are dark brown and gradually change to yellow as the bird matures. Plumages of both sexes are similar, but females are about 25% larger than males. Birds from the northern parts of their range are usually larger than southern birds.

### Similar species

No other species resembles the distinctive adults. The juvenile bald eagle is more likely to be mistaken for a golden eagle.

### Habitat/range

North America from Alaska and Canada to northern Mexico. The bald eagle prefers to live near large bodies of water such as lakes, rivers, and coastal areas with significant forest cover nearby which provides nesting, roosting, and perching sites.



### Food/Diet

An opportunistic predator that feeds on a large variety of prey - fish, birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and invertebrates. Fish is the single most important food but birds and mammals are also heavily consumed. Live prey is taken frequently but the Bald Eagle is also a carrion eater. They are known to steal food from other birds and mammals, and hunt cooperatively at times. Small prey is sometimes eaten in flight, and large carcasses are often fed upon at the kill site for several days. These birds typically hunt from perches but sometimes wade into water to catch prey. They can catch fish 6-12 inches under the surface. They can lift  $\frac{1}{2}$  of their own weight and carry 2-4 pounds.

### Voice

Bald eagles most commonly scream a gull-like cackle or whine, often with their heads tossed back when perching. The female's voice is lower pitched.

### Behavior

The flight of the Bald Eagle is deliberate, steady and slow. In both soaring and gliding flight, the wings are held horizontally at right angles from the body. These birds are very agile fliers and perform spectacular aerial maneuvers at times. The Bald Eagle is somewhat more social than many raptors. Winter aggregations are common in areas where food is abundant. Partial migrant – northern populations migrate south, other populations remain sedentary.

## Reproduction/Nesting

Clutch size: 2

Eggs: white, non-glossy;  
average 2.8" x 2.1"

Incubation: 34 to 36 days

Fledge: 11-12 weeks

Disperse: 6-10 weeks

## Life Span

## Conservation Status

The pair bond is believed to be life-long but a lost mate is replaced and often quickly. Nest sites are generally in a forested area within 1¼ mile of open water. Nests are primarily in trees that are taller, larger and more isolated than surrounding trees. Perch trees are located nearby. In treeless areas, nests are built on the ground, on cliffs, ridge tops or sea stacks on offshore islands. Manmade structures are also used. Nests of branches and sticks are initially one to three feet high and three to six feet in diameter. Over the years, the nests may reach 20 feet in height and over 9 feet in diameter, weighing some 4,000 pounds. Up to five extra nests may be built within the pair's territory.

Longest recorded – 29 years 7 months. In captivity, may live up to 35 - 40 years.

The bald eagle within the lower 48 states is on the US Fish and Wildlife's Threatened Species List. It is also protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the Bald Eagle Act. It is illegal to own any part of one of these birds, including the feathers without a permit. Idaho Fish & Game lists the bald eagle as a protected non game species for which it is illegal to collect, harm or otherwise remove from its natural habitat. Bald eagles within the lower 48 states were first placed on the Endangered Species List on March 11, 1967. The species was down-listed from Endangered to Threatened in 1995. Bald eagles have few natural enemies and people, directly and indirectly, remain the greatest source of mortality: illegal shooting, poisoning, environmental contaminants, collisions with buildings, bridges, powerlines/ electrocution, ingestion of lead and plastic, and oil spills. Human development along the coast and near inland rivers and waterways results in habitat loss (loss of foraging, nesting, perching, and roosting sites), the single most unabated threat to this species.

## Viewing in the NCA

Bald Eagles may be seen wintering along the Snake River in the NCA from November to March. They do not nest in the NCA, but they have nested at Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge at Lake Lowell south of Nampa, Idaho.

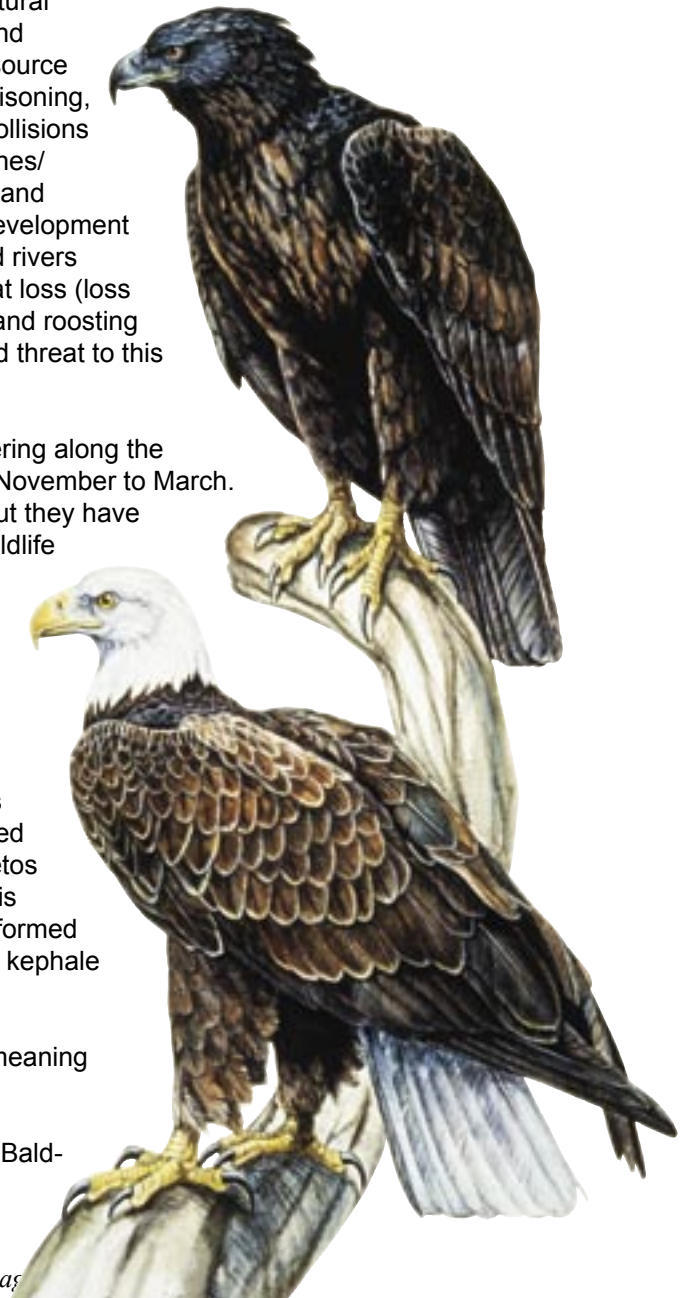
## Interesting Facts

Spanish name: *Aquila cabeza blanca*, *Aquila calva*

The scientific name comes from the Greek word *haliaeetus* meaning sea eagle and is formed from *halos* meaning salt and *aetos* meaning eagle; *leucocephalus* is Greek for white-headed and is formed from *leukos* meaning white and *kephale* for head.

Bald (balde from Old English) meaning "marked with white".

Other names: American Eagle, Bald-headed Eagle, and Fish Eagle.



## Sources

The Bald Eagle is an ingrained part of the mythology of many North American Indian peoples.

The Bald Eagle was declared the national symbol for the United States of America in 1782, despite the paradoxical opinion that the bird was of questionable moral character, dishonest, cowardly and a feeder upon dead matter and offal.

Most nests probably last only about five years but some have been refurbished and used for 35 years. One nest tree was used for over 70 years in Alaska.

AXIA CD ROM – Know Your Birds of Prey

Bird Banding Lab - [www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bbl/homepage/long2890.htm](http://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bbl/homepage/long2890.htm)

Carolina Raptor Center – [www.carolinaraptorcenter.org/b\\_eagle.php](http://www.carolinaraptorcenter.org/b_eagle.php)

Hawk Mt Sanctuary - [www.hawkmountain.org/education/images/Bald%20Eagle.pdf](http://www.hawkmountain.org/education/images/Bald%20Eagle.pdf)

Hogle Zoo <http://www.hoglezoo.org/animals/view.php?id=23>

Idaho Fish&Game - <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/wildlife/nongame/birdspecies.cfm>

National Audubon Society The Sibley Guide to Birds

Peregrine Fund – [www.peregrinefund.org/Explore\\_Raptors/eagles/baldeagl.html](http://www.peregrinefund.org/Explore_Raptors/eagles/baldeagl.html)

US Fish and Wildlife website - <http://endangered.fws.gov/> [http://ecos.fws.gov/docs/life\\_histories/B008.html](http://ecos.fws.gov/docs/life_histories/B008.html)

<http://migratorybirds.fws.gov/intrnltr/mbta/mbtandx.html#h>

Illustration: courtesy Alberta Sustainable Resource Development

Map: The Peregrine Fund

Photography: Tim Sommers

